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Painting from Photographs

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PAINTING FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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BY

JUDITH A. POYNTER

THESIS

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that all paintings should be derived from what can be visually observed at length, this paper explores the use of photographs as a painting aid to the artist. The paper has three main sections. The first section contains historical data, the second contains advantages in using photographic assists, and the third contains personal experiments by the author.

The paper incorporates a brief survey of twenty-five major artists who have worked from photographs with the benefits they obtained from this approach. The artists surveyed were from the seventeenth through the twentieth century.

The second section of the paper outlines various advantages to any contemporary artist working from the photographic media. It also includes information on work techniques.

The last section contains the personal experiments of the author in four categories: painting from published photographs, incorporating photographic transfers into paintings, painting from non-published colored photographs and painting from non-published black and white photographs. The categories are broken into a series of eighteen painting experiments comprised of detailed text and colored illustrations.

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, approaching a bare canvas with the intent of executing an acceptable and satisfying painting can be a rather frightening experience. This has been felt by almost all artists. Fellow painters have experienced this phenomena as well as students. The problem seems to arise, not from a lack of confidence in ability, but rather from the decisions of what to paint and how to begin. From experience, one solution found to work well is based on the philosophy "paint what you know."

This philosophy lends itself to any style or technique. It is obvious the photo-realist painter is well acquainted with his subject, has studied it in detail, and can approach his canvas with confidence and be secure in his knowledge. On the other hand, although his style differs greatly, as does the end result, the abstract painter relies on what he personally has observed as the springboard for his ideas.

At the other end of the spectrum, consider the amateur painter who wants to portray the Grand Canyon in all its splendor on his first canvas. He has never been west of the Mississippi, but in his mind's eye he knows just how it should look. If viewed by the art community as primitive in style, the finished product may be acceptable. The painter, however, is less than satisfied.

If, for clarity, "paint what you know" is reduced to "paint what you can visually observe at length," are all painters relegated to the studio? Must painting be limited to still-lives and portraits? If in-depth knowledge of the subject is so helpful, are a multitude of subject areas eliminated? If the use of photographs as painting aids in the studio is introduced, the artist's choice of subject areas is unlimited.

HISTORICAL SURVEY

The use of photographs as painting aids is not a new idea. A brief survey of some of the major artists from the fifteenth to the twentieth century proves this statement. According to Van Deren Coke.

The action of light, as it enters a small aperture into a dark room to project an image, has a history that extends back to the ancient Greeks. During the Middle Ages, Arab scholars noted this effect and constructed camera obscuras to study the heavens. The literature of the Renaissance contains a number of descriptions of this curious mechanism, including that of Leonardo da Vinci, who sketched a camera obscura in his Codex Atlanticus. Da Vinci said that the images created by the device "will actually seem painted on paper."¹

During the 15th Century the camera obscura, forerunner of all photographic cameras, produced a reversed image on a ground glass screen inside a box opposite a small opening. Familiar object and views could now be systematically reconstructed and hand traced. One point perspective became mathematically accurate. Deep space could be viewed on a flat surface in reduced scale. Artists were able to see and copy perspective accurately, as well as precise details and true representations of light and shade.²

¹"Codex Atlanticus", MS, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, quoted in Van Deren Coke, The Painter and the Photograph, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), pp. 1-3.

²Van Deren Coke, The Painter and the Photograph, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), pp. 1-3.

Although the camera obscura was mainly used as a copying tool for draftsmen, many art historians think Jan Vermeer used the device to compose View of Delft, 1658, and Young Girl with a Flute, 1665. Since the camera obscura produced no lasting image for comparison, they base their assumption on the fact that Vermeer incorporated elements in these compositions that are not usually observed by the unaided eye. The wide angle of view common to the camera obscura is also found in other paintings by Vermeer.³

Italian painters of the baroque and rococo periods used the camera obscura to render panoramic views of cities and the countryside as indicated by their compressed perspective, extremely wide foregrounds and limited sense of depth. Throughout the eighteenth century artists used the camera obscura even though its lens created unnaturally dark shadows and foreshortened images.⁴

The introduction of the daguerreotype in 1839 proved advantageous to the painter. Precise and realistic images could be produced, and through the use of chemicals these images could be made permanent.⁵ While some artists of the period feared this early form of the modern photograph would replace paintings, others formed a different outlook. In 1840, while addressing the National Academy of Design, the painter-inventor Samuel F. B. Morse pointed out that

³Ibid., p. 3.

⁴Ibid., pp. 3-5.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

daguerreotypes " . . . will ease the artist's task by providing him with facsimile sketches of nature, buildings, landscapes, groups of figures . . . scenes selected in accordance with the peculiarities of his own taste . . . not copies of nature, but portions of nature itself" ⁶

American landscapist Thomas Cole felt there was little danger of painting being replaced by this new invention because " . . . the art of painting is creative, as well as an imitative art, and is in no danger of being superseded by any mechanical contrivance." ⁷

Eugene Delacroix was the first French painter of quality to support the use of photographs as a painting aid. A student of Ingres, Jules-Claude Ziegler loaned his daguerreotypes of male nudes to Delacroix. Delacroix drew and painted from these as well as from paper prints. In 1853 and 1854 Delacroix himself posed models and had them photographed by a friend for future study. In 1853, in his Journal, he wrote, "let a man of genius make use of the daguerreotype as it should be used, and he will raise himself to a height that we do not know." ⁸

During the nineteenth century more and more artists began to use photographs to assist them in painting. The early work of Edgar Degas (Head of a Woman, 1860-62 and The Belleli

⁶Samuel F.B. Morse, Letter to cousin, 14 February 1841, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., quoted in Coke, The Painter and the Photograph, p. 7.

⁷Coke, p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 9.

Sisters, 1862-64) may have been done from photographs. Degas' portrait of Princess Metternich, 1875, was copied from a photograph by Adolphe-Eugene Disderi, giving evidence that major artists felt it permissible to use photographs.⁹

Thomas Eakins used his own photographs instead of detailed sketches when painting. Although he changed a number of elements in his oil, Hauling the Seine, 1882, there is still a close relationship to his photograph of the same title. This relationship is even closer in the watercolor Drawing the Seine done the same year. Paul Cezanne, a contemporary of Eakins, also used photographs. A shy man, he found it easier to work from photographs than in front of a live model. Since he worked so slowly, it would have been difficult to find a model capable of maintaining a pose for the time he spent on a single painting. His full-length painting, The Bather, 1885-90, was done from the work of an unknown photographer. The photograph is static, a studio portrait of a man, nude except for a pair of brief trunks. Cezanne's painting depicts the same man outdoors, and in motion.¹⁰

Like Eakins, the Dutch Impressionist artist George-Hendrik Breitner based his paintings on his own photographs. Using a small Kodak camera he captured casual compositions of street scenes, the movement of people as they pursued their everyday business. In leisure Breitner studied the results in his studio. The 1895 photograph, Wheelbarrow Men, resulted in

⁹Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 83.

his oil, Kruiers, 1895, and his photograph Three Young Girls, 1895, was rendered in oil the same year and titled Drie Meisjes.¹¹

In 1889 James Ensor used a snapshot to draw an unusual self-portrait. An etching, a skeletonized likeness, then evolved, My Portrait Skeletonized State 3. According to the Ensor scholar Libby Tannenbaum, the late nineteenth-century Expressionist used photographs mainly in relation to portraits and self portraits.¹² Another Expressionist, Vincent Van Gogh, planned to work for an Antwerp photographer in exchange for portraits to paint. Though none of these have been discovered, it is known that Van Gogh painted a portrait of his mother from a photograph in Arles in 1888.¹³

Paul Gauguin also worked from a photograph to paint his mother's portrait. Gauguin borrowed many ideas from existing photographs. The photograph, Two Women, taken by postmaster Henry Lemasson in Tahiti, was Gauguin's guide for his 1890 painting, Mother and Daughter. The forms in the painting were simplified and flattened, the facial features exaggerated to give them a monumental quality and the women were placed in a more exotic setting.¹⁴ Three years later Gauguin painted Pape Moe, from the 1883 photograph by Charles Spitz,

¹¹Ibid., p. 89

¹²Libby Tannenbaum to Van Deren Coke, May 1964, quoted in Coke, The Painter and the Photograph, p. 55.

¹³Coke, pp. 55-57.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 57.

Tahitian Youngster Drinking from a Waterfall. The pool in the photograph was eliminated in Gauguin's painting. The vegetation was simplified, lending an air of mystery relative to the title, Pape Moe (The Mysterious Water).¹⁵

The best known turn-of-the-century artist to work from photographs was Henri Toulouse-Lautrec. The essential elements, the girl's dress and her pose, were taken from a Paul Sescou photograph when Lautrec painted A La Mie in 1891. As directed by Lautrec, Sescou photographed Maurice Guilbert and a model at a cafe table. Lautrec, like Degas, used photographic distortion in his painting. The horses rump, greatly exaggerated in the painting, Fernando Circus: The Ring Master is an example of this distortion. In 1900 Lautrec wrote to a close friend requesting photographs of a popular opera, stating, "Have you any photographs, good or bad, . . . the more documentation I have, the better I shall be able to work."¹⁶

In one of his early works Andre Derain painted At the Surennes Ball, 1903, from a snapshot of off-duty soldiers in a dance hall. Derain then turned his back on photographs and in 1905 joined the Fauves. Using bright vibrant colors was an attempt to become disassociated from the influences of the camera. During this period he wrote, "It was the era of photography. This may have influenced us, and played

¹⁵Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁶Toulouse-Lautrec, New York, 1942, p. 356, quoted in Coke, The Painter and the Photograph, p. 91.

a part in our reaction against anything resembling a snapshot of life."¹⁷ During the twenties Derain returned to photographs, finding them useful as guiding documentaries when he began painting nudes.¹⁸

Edvard Munch, working in the same time period as Derain, also used a photograph of a nude for at least one of his paintings. One of his own photographs, a double exposure, was his source for the 1907 Young Girl in Front of Bed. Critics feel the heavy-handed painting is less provocative than his more detailed photograph.¹⁹

In a series of drawings made between 1917 and 1919 Pablo Picasso worked from photographs. His 1917 drawing, Renoir, was traced from a photograph of the elderly, crippled man, eliminating the intricate pattern of the coat and emphasizing the principal form. Working from a single photograph Picasso painted two pictures of his son Paul in 1923. One is of the boy's head and the other shows him seated on a burro. The child's eyes are enlarged in the paintings, but the perplexed expression recorded by the camera was retained.²⁰

Picasso's friend, Diego Rivera, included a self portrait in one of his large fresco murals located in the Education

¹⁷Modern French Painting, New York, 1956, p. 131, quoted in Coke, The Painter and the Photograph, p. 95.

¹⁸Coke, p. 95.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 65.

Building in Mexico City in the early twenties, entitled, Trinity of Architect, Sculptor and Painter. By omitting the strong shadows, Rivera's rendering lacks the introspective quality found in the Edward Weston photograph of the artist.²¹

Ashile' Gorky painted two versions of the well known The Artist and His Mother between 1926 and 1936. A faded 1912 photograph, a stiff, formal studio pose taken in Armenia when Gorky was eight, provided the artist with the basic format for his paintings. He retained the harsh lighting, typical of photographs of the period, allowing him to isolate the features against the face. The clothing details were omitted or simplified.²²

During the 1930s news photography attracted the attention of a few painters and by the late fifties and early sixties many artists began to see the possibilities inherent in the media. The appeal was directly related to the vogue for "found objects", and to the desire to return to a more realistic subject matter.²³ Some artists looked for unusual image relationships, some were intrigued by the camera's expressive potential, and others were influenced by the subject matter. Pablo Picasso was one of the latter. His 1945 painting, Charnel House, contains the same elements as did a widely published photograph of the Nazi extermination camp in Belsen, Germany. In the same vein, Rico LeDrun's series

²¹Ibid., p. 65.

²²Ibid., p. 69.

²³Ibid., p. 109.

of paintings, Floor of Buchenwald, 1950s, were inspired by Lee Miller's photograph, Buchenwald, 1945. Many critics, though, feel that the photograph is much the stronger work, due perhaps to the more organized and orderly composition of LeBrun's efforts.²⁴

During the Abstract Expressionism period few portraits were made. Elaine de Kooning's, Portrait of Caryl Chessman, 1963, was one exception. Her symbolic gouache was based on a magazine photograph of the condemned in a California prison. Hardly recognizable in the heavily worked forms of the painting, the image made by the camera was her starting place. The strong overhead prison lights reflecting on Chessman's hands in the photograph caused de Kooning to emphasize them in her painting.²⁵

In his modified Abstract Expressionism style, Larry Rivers painted a portrait, Europe II, of his Polish relatives. He worked from a 1928 family photograph. In typical Rivers style, the individuals are blurred and likenesses few, even though the photograph was clear and straightforward. His spontaneous brush strokes seem to compete with the photographic images and the repetition of head forms introduce a sense of movement.²⁶ Rivers places the spotlight on commonplace events by mixing his ability to create photographic images with his skill as an abstractionist. His painting, Bar Mitzvah, 1960,

²⁴Ibid., p. 71.

²⁵Ibid., p. 71.

²⁶Ibid.

has a hint of social commentary to it. According to Coke,

Rivers uses the photograph not only in its emblematic sense as a manifestation of our popular culture but also for its insistent memory. For him the photograph is a static record that he can animate through the facile use of his brush while still retaining distinct vestiges of the realism preserved on film.²⁷

Photo-collages have been used by artists as early as the nineteenth century to include groups of people and to make humorous compositions. In the years following World War I both Surrealists and Dadaists made wide use of the photograph as a source of visual ideas. Max Ernst, Paul Citroën, and George Grosz were among the latter group. They found a ready means of voicing their disillusionment with society in juxtaposed photographs.²⁸

In the late sixties Robert Rauschenberg often used applied or transferred photographs in his mixed media compositions. The imagery in The Blue Cloud, 1967, was transferred from reproduced photographs. He initially transferred photographs to drawing paper by coating them with turpentine or lighter fluid and rubbing the reverse side with a pencil. Later he used commercially made silk screens of photographs and printed on his canvases, softening some areas, layering others.²⁹

No matter how brief, no survey of major artists who have worked from photographs would be complete without the

²⁷Ibid., p. 71.

²⁸Ibid., p. 225.

²⁹Ibid., p. 243.

inclusion of Charles Sheeler. The relationship between Sheeler's paintings and photographs is easily seen. When seen in black and white, side by side, it is difficult to distinguish the painting from the photograph. The close relationship is understandable since photography was Sheeler's occupation in the first part of the twentieth century. He made effective use of his own photographs as image sources for his famous paintings of machinery and industrial landscapes. In the late twenties Sheeler gave up the simplicity of Cubism and his paintings became dominated by the camera. Many feel the severe and dynamic power of his industrial paintings can be attributed to an eye sharpened by working with a camera. Sheeler incorporated camera-type vision by rendering details and distortions unlike those considered normal perspective. His Delmonico Building, 1926, copies the effect produced when a lens is pointed upward. The tendency to tidy up and simplify esthetically unpleasing parts of a painting was perhaps Sheeler's method of idealizing his subject matter. Changes in the light core in his 1931 painting, Cactus, and the elimination of the grease and dirt in Drive Wheels, 1939, are examples of this practice. Sheeler used his black and white photographs to study form, and his Kodachrome slides as color notes for painting. He further capitalized on photographs with multiple exposures, using the phenomenon for esthetic purposes to add unusual design qualities to his painting, Continuity, 1957.³⁰ In a 1967

³⁰Ibid., pp. 213-219.

issue of Contemporary Photographer, Charles Millard has written,

Sheeler seems first to have used photographs in the compositions of paintings and drawings in the early twenties. From that time forward, he appears to have found occasional inspiration in his photographs and used them for painting, and increasingly to have photographed with specific intent of making paintings from the results.³¹

³¹"Charles Sheeler: American Photographer," Contemporary Photographer, 1967, p. 55, quoted in Cokc, The Painter and the Photographer, p. 217.

THE ADVANTAGES

On a more contemporary note, the use of photographs in a studio setting may not be desirable to everyone, but many modern painters have found it an invaluable aid when searching for subject matter. Further, using photographs has many times eased the initial steps in the painting process. Photographs can extend the artist's knowledge in a number of ways.

Landscape painting may be enjoyable but frequently it is impossible to paint on location. Weather conditions often prohibit careful and prolonged observations and frequently details change too quickly to be recorded. Artists also find the time element detrimental to outdoor painting. Many painters can only work evenings and weekends. Transportation time to and from location, plus changes in light add to the problem. People also add to the list of hindrances by erecting fences and standing in front of the subject matter. Being able to refer to landscape photographs in the convenience of a studio overcomes these handicaps. The same scene, at different seasons, from different angles and under various light conditions can be easily and quickly recorded on film.

Landscape painting is not the only subject area nor are references to photographs personally taken by the artist. The artist's environment may be limited, but not his access

to photographs that take him beyond his immediate environment, that extend his knowledge. Monochromatic and colored photographs are reproduced by the thousands in countless magazines and newspapers and are easily accessible to anyone. They take the artist to lands he could never visit, show him cultures completely new, and make him aware of everyday things previously overlooked. Snapshots loaned by friends are another convenient source.

Another advantage in using photographs deals with re-composing. Frequently, the photographs do not suit one's sense of composition; the information is there, but not in the desired arrangement. Hours could be spent re-drawing and changing elements. Several color sketches could be made. But, by experimenting one learns some shortcuts. Areas may be taped off on the photograph to change its overall dimensions. Photographs may be cut to try different arrangements of the pieces, sometimes spacing the pieces on different colors. Combining photographs, or parts of them, is another method that can be used. Graphing the photograph in order to enlarge it on canvas can only be done with a satisfactorily composed photograph. This technique, successful for some, does not work for everyone. The resulting work often looks tight and rigid. These shortcuts save not only time, but materials as well. They have been used on published photographs as well as non-published prints.

An amateur photographer can also learn to experiment with composition, both in the camera and in the darkroom.

Time, materials and effort can be lessened if the subject matter can be composed behind the lens instead of later. Since film is cheaper than time, many frames of the same subject should be taken. Changing lens, camera angles and distances, and using different lighting techniques not only gives needed information, it can also set a mood.

Black and white film is a challenge and an aid. Using it means learning to see in terms of black, white, and gray; learning to reduce a riot of color to volumes of tone. The artist learns to rely on strong compositional elements rather than distracting detail. Plus-X or Tri-X film works well in most any setting.

In the darkroom, further changes in composition and mood can be achieved in a short amount of time and at a minimum of expense. Black and white film is preferable because it is faster, easier to handle, and less expensive. Experimenting with cropping and enlarging can be done without even exposing the paper. Dodging, burning-in and exposure time can all change the mood of a photograph. Experiments with double exposure, in both the camera and the enlarger, can be made. The satisfaction is doubled when painting from photographs taken and developed personally. Artists find working from black and white prints also gives them more freedom to experiment with color.

Photographs can be carefully copied to create nearly exact reproductions in paint. Some painters find this approach does not work well because they have yet to find the

photograph they do not want to change in some way. In attempting to paint a careful copy of a portion of a photograph, they find themselves so locked up in a single area they tend to lose sight of the overall surface. Yet other painters work in this manner with outstanding results. The conclusion, therefore, must be that the problem is a personal one and not due to the approach.

Photographs can also be used merely as an idea source. They are an informative means of inspiration from which a painting may evolve which may have no easily apparent relationship with its origin. A painting of this type can be one in a series on the chain of evolution or can evolve in a single jump. Changing media, changing style and changing technique are ways to experiment.

Another approach to using photographs lies between careful copies and idea sources. Most of this artist's experiments have been in this approach to painting. Quasi-photographic painting is confining, yet there is a desire to rely on photographs for their concrete information. Personally, the most satisfaction comes from work based on reality.

THE EXPERIMENTS

The following illustrated text, based on this artist's personal experiments, is broken into four categories. The first category pertains to paintings from published photographs and the second with incorporating photographic transfers into paintings. The third category deals with paintings from the artist's own color prints and the final category with paintings from the artist's original black and white photographs.

PAINTINGS FROM PUBLISHED PHOTOGRAPHS

The idea for the first four paintings (Plates 1, 2, 3, 4) was derived from a magazine advertisement. Whether it was the vivid red fruit or the stark layout of the ad that drew this artist's attention cannot be recalled. The painting being rendered at the time (Plate 1) was the artist's first serious work after a seven year lapse as well as the first attempt at mastering acrylics. Added to these two problems was the fact that after painting the drapery and urn the artist could think of no further suitable subject matter to complete the painting. No attempt was made to copy the photograph. Satisfaction was gained in merely finding a subject that fit the work. As the bright red apples were being painted, the artist began to enjoy the painting for the first time.

Wanting to retain the same media, subject and mood in the next painting (Plate 2), composition became the artist's main concern. The apples were positioned first, keyed as to color, and the rest seemed to fall easily into place. Although there was still a struggle with manipulating the media, the artist was able to maintain the dramatic lighting and diagonal thrust of the first painting. The setting change from grandiose to a more domestic, genre scene went well.

The third in the series (Plate 3), still inspired by the same photograph, was an experiment in incorporating a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface. The

obvious choice was an apple. After deciding the most effective placement for the form would be overlapping the frame, the entire canvas was painted and the frame constructed. A plaster mold was made of an apple. The mold was then cast in plaster and again in ceramic slip. The slip casting had a finer finish and was lighter in weight. It was fired, painted with acrylics and adhered to the canvas with epoxy.

The surrealist watercolor (Plate 4) is, to date, the final in the series. It was painted a year later and bears little resemblance in style or mood to the earlier acrylic paintings. The repetition of the same vivid red was done intentionally as a comparison of medias. The artist was delighted to find the same color could be attained in another media.

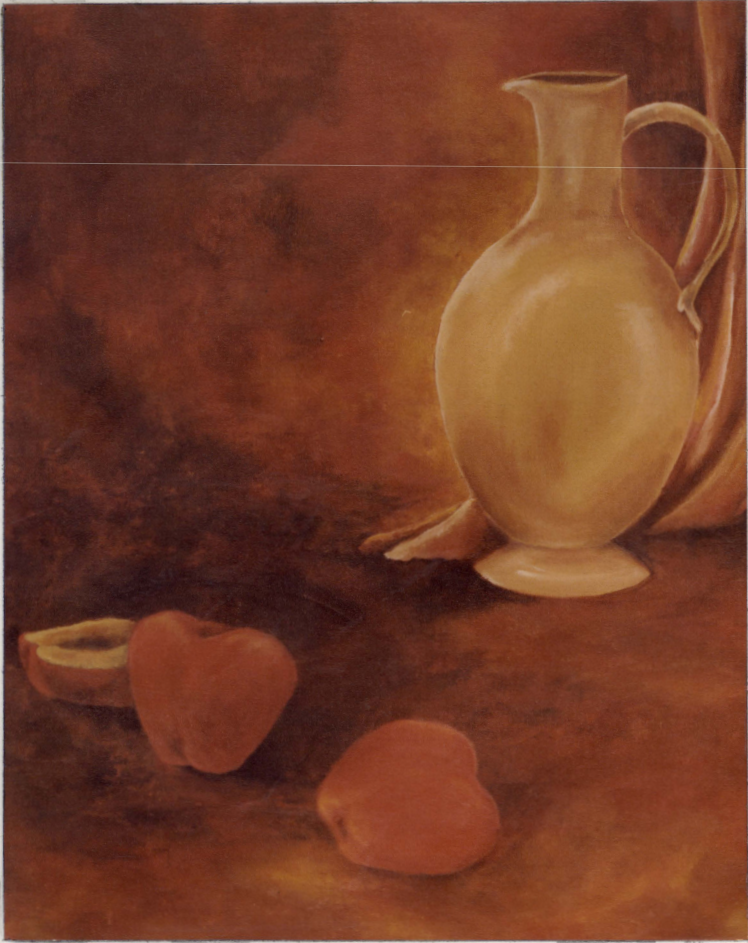


Plate 1: Acrylic #1. 1979. 40 x 32 in.



Plate 2: Acrylic //2. 1979. 24 x 36 in.



Plate 3: Acrylic #3 1979. 33 x 25 in.

Plate 4 is a copy of a photograph taken in the 1970s
 issue of Life magazine entitled "The World's Most
 The subject, a photograph of a dead tree in a forest
 forest floor, was this artist's first work of the kind
 to be found in the magazine's pages. The color
 relationship of the leaves and their natural placement
 appealed to the sense of composition. From this photograph
 the artist completed, in gouache on vellum (Plate 5),
 and later a watercolor (Plate 7).



Plate 4: Watercolor #1. 1980. 11 x 13 in.

Plate 5 is a copy of a photograph printed in the 1973 issue of Time-Life Books entitled "The Great Divide." The subject, a close-up view of dead leaves carpeting a forest floor, made this artist aware once more of the beauty to be found in the simple things in nature. The color relationship of the leaves and their natural placement appealed to the sense of composition. From this photograph the artist completed two paintings, an acrylic (Plate 6), and later a watercolor (Plate 7).

Since the general composition in the photograph was so strong, only the dimensions were changed in the acrylic painting (Plate 6). The canvas was stretched slightly narrower and a portion of the bottom of the photograph was eliminated while painting. The artist further eliminated most of the raindrops which allowed the leaves to take on an almost abstract quality.

The watercolor painting (Plate 7) was done in an attempt to more closely match the color of the central leaf in the photograph and also to re-insert the raindrops. The original plan was a realistic rendering of the central leaf surrounded by an expanse of white paper. After completing it in that manner it appeared too bare and unfinished. The surrounding leaves, stylistically softened, were added to resolve the problem.



Plate 5: Copy of Published Photograph. ND.



Plate 6: Acrylic //4. 1979. 37 x 19 in.



Plate 7: Watercolor #2. 1980. 20 x 13 in.

The last painting done from a published photograph is a watercolor (Plate 9). The photograph (Plate 8) was found in a back issue of National Geographic, as are many resource photographs this artist chooses. The soft blue haze that covers the scene made it look more like a painting than a typical hard-edge photograph. The subject seemed to demand working on a larger surface than had previously been attempted. While lightly sketching in the background hill and buildings the artist determined to duplicate exactly the village layout. The decision was abandoned, though, after becoming confused a number of times in the myriad buildings. The artist did, however, carry through with the overall layout and color harmony.



Plate 8: Copy of Published Photograph. ND.



Plate 9: Watercolor #3. 1980. 17 x 21 in.

INCORPORATING PHOTOGRAPHIC TRANSFERS INTO PAINTINGS

Transferring photographs from magazines to another surface with acrylic medium is not a new process, but using these transfers as an integral part of a watercolor painting was a technique new to this artist. Back issues of National Geographic provided an unlimited supply of photographs with just about any given subject. The slick, glossy paper used by the magazine lends itself well to the transfer process.

Plate 10, a type of social-commentary painting, was almost ruined in the mid point of its completion. Not enough care had been used in pressing the acrylic coated photograph to the watercolor paper, resulting in air bubbles being trapped between the papers. These were discovered as the damp paper backing on the photograph was rubbed off and blank areas appeared. At the same time it was discovered that 50 lb. watercolor paper was too lightweight, its surface peeling off with the photograph. A partial and spotty transfer was not the artist's goal, yet the subject matter still held a strong appeal. Trying to salvage the work, the blank areas were filled in with paint, matching and contrasting colors. It soon became apparent that a careless accident was fortuitous. The transferred photograph had become more subtle, submerged in flecks and streaks of color. Since there was one final photograph to be transferred to the painting, fate was not tempted by using the same method; instead a more indirect lift method was used to transfer the last photograph.



Plate 10: Watercolor with Transfers #4. 1980. 16 x 9 in.

The lift method used to complete the watercolor painting #4 was the only transfer process used in the following painting (Plate 11). When the photograph of the monkey was found, the artist had no idea of how to use it in a painting. At that point the artist's main interest was in the further exploration of the lift process.

"Decal-it", a transfer emulsion manufactured by Connoisseur Studio, Inc., was the agent used. It is a white liquid in a squeeze bottle that dries clear. After roughly cutting out the photograph and laying it on waxed paper, six to nine coats of the emulsion are brushed on, allowing twenty minutes drying time between coats. Two additional hours drying time is needed after the final coat is applied. The photograph is later soaked in warm water for an hour to loosen the paper backing. The photograph can then be placed, face down, on waxed paper over a flat, hard surface. The paper can be rolled off the emulsion-coated ink with the gentle pressure of a finger tip. Extreme care must be used not to stretch or tear the plastic film that binds the ink. Once the paper is removed, the film tends to curl which makes cutting the final shape difficult. After the final shape is cut, another thin layer of "decal-it" is brushed on the back and the transfer is carefully pressed into place on the painting surface. When dry, the transfer can be painted around with no problem and the plastic surface will accept paint to a certain extent.

PAINTINGS FROM NON-PUBLISHED COLORED PHOTOGRAPHS

This artist seldom finds snapshots that are suitable to work from without making changes in them. All too often the color scheme is too dull or the composition is too cluttered. Memories, however, may leave a strong impression and many new ideas can often be developed.



Plate 11: Watercolor with Transfer #5. 1980. 14 x 10 in.

The original photograph was taken by the artist of an abandoned ice house on the Mississippi river in Hannibal, Missouri. It has been cut into pieces and rearranged to strengthen the composition. The resulting watercolor painting (Plate 15) shows the new composition as well as a higher key color scheme.

PAINTINGS FROM NON-PUBLISHED COLORED PHOTOGRAPHS

This artist seldom finds snapshots that are suitable to work from without making changes in them. All too often the color quality is poor which is frequently due to quick processing. The person behind the lens may be capturing memories, but from an artistic standpoint the composition may leave a lot to be desired. But those snapshots do offer many new subject areas to explore, and the necessary changes can often be easily made.

Plate 12 is a copy of a photograph given to the artist. It was taken by a friend with an instamatic camera while vacationing in Maine. The only compositional change made was to eliminate some of the surrounding foliage and to emphasize the building by a circular format. The watercolor (Plate 13) was not intended to be a replica of the print, but rather a quickly executed impression of it.

Plate 14 is a photo-copy of an original photograph taken by the artist of an abandoned ice house on the Mississippi river in Hannibal, Missouri. It has been cut into pieces and rearranged to strengthen the composition. The resulting watercolor painting (Plate 15) shows the new composition as well as a higher key color scheme.



Plate 12: Copy of Photograph. 1977.



Plate 13: Watercolor //6. 1980. 10 in.



Plate 14: Copy of Photograph. 1978.

PRINTINGS FROM ORIGINAL BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

This final category is painting experiments of a

which the one that gives the artist the most

through trial and error the artist is beginning to

consistent with a culture and in a darkness. There is a

challenge of looking for new and personally appealing

to find a new and personally appealing

to find a new and personally appealing



Plate 15: Watercolor //7. 1980. 11 x 16 in.

PAINTINGS FROM ORIGINAL BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

This final category of painting experiments is probably the one that gives this artist the most satisfaction. Through trial and error the artist is beginning to feel competent with a camera and in a darkroom. There is a challenge in looking for new and personally appealing subjects while searching for strong composition, and a delight to be found in watching them slowly appear on a blank paper in a chemical bath. Reproducing something one has seen, in the way that only that person has seen it, is very rewarding. This artist approaches painting from original black and white prints with a freer attitude, not hesitating to experiment and change. Reality has been reproduced, now it can be improved, distorted, made a personal possession. The painting process becomes one of enjoyment, not labor.

The last five plates are examples of this artist's original black and white photographs and the resulting water-color paintings.



Plate 16: Photograph. 1980.



Plate 17: Watercolor #8. 1980. 10 x 14 in.



Plate 18: Photograph. 1980.



Plate 19: Watercolor #9. 1980. 15 x 11 in.



Plate 20: Watercolor #10. 1980. 14 x 10 in.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was the detailed exploration, through personal experimentation and research, of the use of photographs as a means of assisting the painter in a studio setting. The exploration was based on the philosophy that paintings, regardless of style, media or technique, should be derived from what the artist is familiar with, from what he has personally observed.

Through personal experience this artist found painting on location impractical and limiting most of the time. The search for subject matter often seemed fruitless. At the same time, this artist became intrigued with the assortment of available photographs. Modern photography, many times, offered interesting compositions and appealing subject matter. Painting from photographs proved to extend the artists immediate environment as well as to provide idea sources. This artist also investigated a number of techniques for photographic usage in the painting studio.

Along with the artists renewed interest in painting grew a fascination with the field of photography. Experimentation in the painting studio was extended to the photographic laboratory, and the artist found the satisfaction doubled.

Through personal experimentation and through research, the author has found the reasons for using photographs in painting as numerous and varied as the advantages. Further, the author would encourage any painter, amateur to professional, to try some of the experiments outlined in this paper.

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